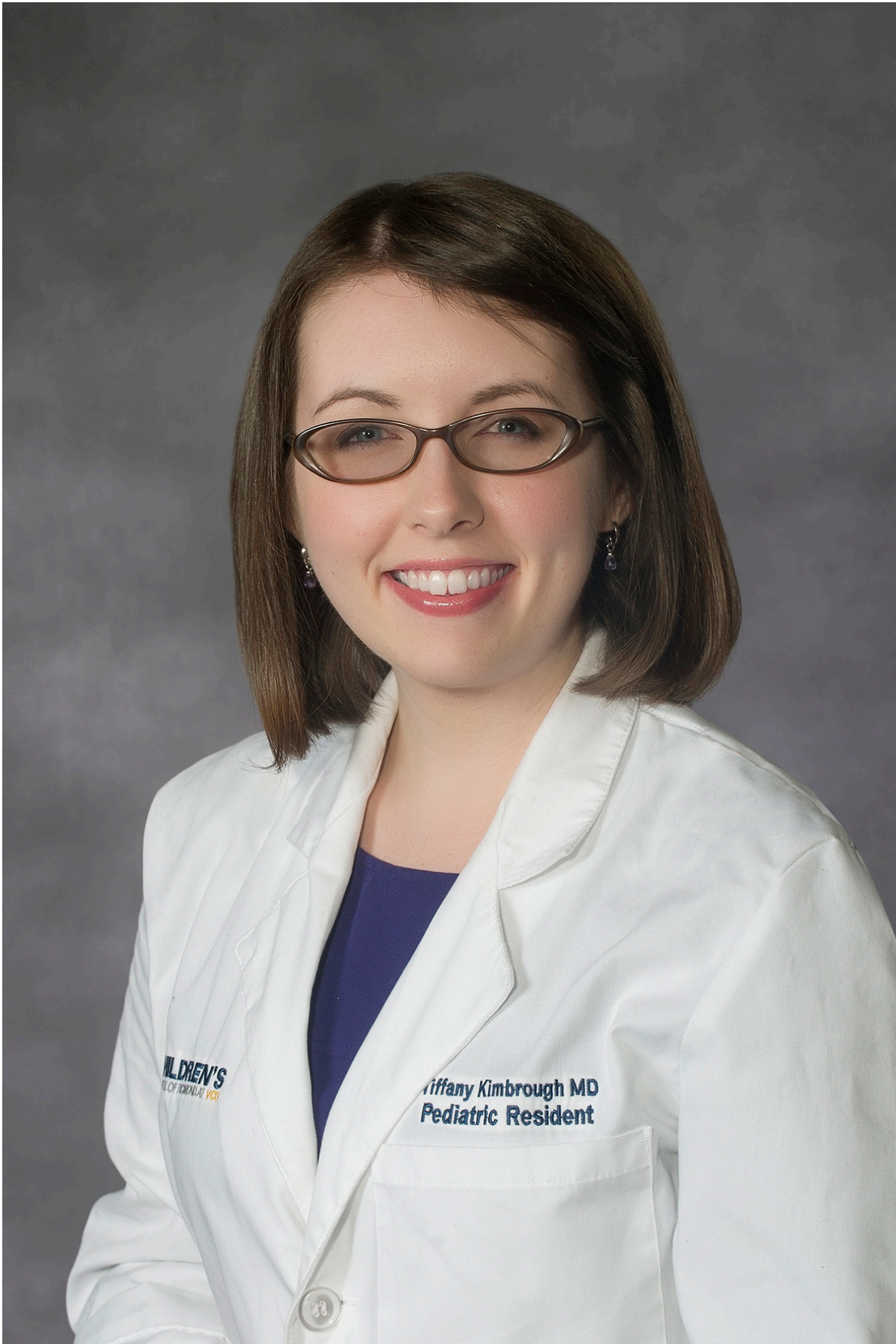


# **Hand, foot and mouth disease: What is it and how can it be prevented?**

November 23 2016, by Carrie Carroll

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Tiffany Kimbrough, M.D.

As winter approaches and outside temperatures drop, illnesses usually begin to increase. This is especially true in children and one of the most common and contagious childhood illness is hand, foot and mouth disease. Tiffany Kimbrough, M.D., assistant professor of general pediatrics at the Children's Hospital of Richmond at Virginia Commonwealth University, answered questions about this virus and how to prevent children from contracting it.

## **What is hand, foot and mouth disease?**

A common viral illness that usually affects infants and children younger than five years old. It is well-known for causing blisters throughout the body and mouth.

## **How is it contracted? Are there certain times of the year when it's more prevalent?**

Hand, foot and mouth disease is spread through saliva, mucous from the nose, fluid from the blisters and stool. It is contracted by being in close contact with another person, breathing the same air—due to coughing and sneezing—touching contaminated objects and surfaces or touching dirty diapers/stool and then touching your mouth without handwashing. All of these reasons are why hand, foot and mouth disease is so prevalent in daycares. It is most commonly seen in summer and early fall.

## **What are the symptoms? How can you tell if your**

## **child has hand, foot and mouth disease?**

Symptoms usually start off as fever, sore throat, decreased energy and decreased appetite. A few days later, bumps can show up in the mouth or on the arms and legs. The bumps in the mouth may turn into blisters and ulcers on the back of the throat and on the insides of the cheeks and lips. They are very painful and make it difficult to eat and drink. The rash on the body can involve the palms, soles of the feet, buttocks, and diaper area and may progress to blisters as well. Because viruses behave differently in different people, there can be some variation in symptoms from one child to the next.

## **Approximately how long do symptoms last?**

Symptoms are generally present for three to four days total. There are few complications from the disease with the exception of dehydration since it hurts to eat and drink. Parents should monitor how their child is eating and drinking and how many wet diapers or trips to the bathroom he or she is making. If it has been longer than eight hours between diapers/urination, parents should call their doctor.

## **Are there any treatments or ways to keep a child with hand, foot and mouth disease comfortable?**

Avoid spicy or acidic foods like fruit juices or tomato sauce—these will make the blisters hurt more. Cold liquids like Pedialyte, popsicles and ice cream are better options. Soft foods like puddings and jello might also be easier to swallow. Over the counter pain relievers like ibuprofen or acetaminophen can be used as well. For questions about whether these are appropriate for your child, parents should call their [health care provider](#). Aspirin should always be avoided in children. Also check with a health care provider before trying any other mouth-soothing therapies.

## **Are there ways to prevent or lower the risk of contracting hand, foot and mouth disease?**

The best method is good handwashing and staying away from others if you or your child are ill. Clean and disinfect surfaces that may come in contact with children's mouths or stool. Children are the most contagious during the first week of the illness and should not return to daycare until the skin lesions have healed.

## **Can adults contract this virus as well?**

Hand, foot and mouth disease most commonly affects infants and children younger than five to seven years old. However, children, adolescents and adults can be impacted as well. Adults will often have no symptoms, but can spread the virus to others. Occasionally, adults will have [symptoms](#) as well, but are usually milder than in [children](#).

Provided by Virginia Commonwealth University

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